

Message Text

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 2159

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PGOV LE
SUBJ: LEBANON IN CRISIS: CONVERSATION WITH WALID JUMBLATT

1. PAO MALIK AND I LUNCHEDED WITH WALID JUMBLATT AND MARWAN HAMMADE (GHASSAN TUENI'S BROTHER-IN-LAW, A YAZBEKI DRUZE AND, IN EFFECT, MANAGING EDITOR OF INFLUENTIAL DAILY AN-NAHAR) APRIL 15. POINT OF LUNCH WAS TO DISCUSS WHETHER JUMBLATT SHOULD LEAVE FOR U.S. FOLLOWING DAY AS SCHEDULED ON INTERNATIONAL VISITORS GRANT. WE AGREED THAT GIVEN CURRENT CRISIS, HE COULD NOT LEAVE. FOLLOWING POINTS OF INTEREST EMERGED DURING CONVERSATION.

2. JUMBLATT AND HAMMADE SAID SARKIS WAS INCREASINGLY REGARDED BY MUSLIMS AS PRISONER OF RIGHT-WING CHRISTIAN LEBANESE FRONT (WHICH IN TURN CONSIDERS HIM PRISONER OF SYRIANS). THEY SAID MAJOR SCANDAL WAS BREWING OVER VARIOUS DECLARATIONS MADE BY SYRIANS, GOL AND OTHERS ABOUT SYRIAN BOMBARDMENT OF AIN AR-RUMMANEH LAST WEEK (MORE IN SEPTTEL). JUMBLATT SAID HE WAS AFRAID SYRIANS WERE GOING TO DUMP SARKIS AND BRING IN
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A FRANGIEH MAN TO REPLACE HIM. HE THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE CATASTROPHIC. (WE THINK IT'S PRETTY FAR-FETCHED.)

3. THEY ALSO SAID THAT "THIS SIDE", I.E., WEST BEIRUT, REGARDS NEW LEBANESE ARMY AS A CHRISTIAN ARMY SUBSERVIENT TO LEBANESE FRONT. COL. BARAKAT, ALTHOUGH THEORETICALLY IN A TURKEY ROOST AT ARMY HEADQUARTERS, WAS STILL VERY INFLUENTIAL

AT FAYYADIYAH. JUMBLATT EXPRESSED PERSONAL APPREHENSION THAT NEW ARMY WILL BE USED TO ATTACK DRUZE.

4. FINALLY, JUMBLATT ASKED ME TO TELL CHAMOUN PLEASE NOT TO CAUSE TROUBLES IN THE SHUF, WHERE THE SITUATION WAS VERY DELICATE. HE DID NOT GIVE DETAILS. (LAST TIME I MENTIONED JUMBLATT TO CHAMOUN LATTER SNORTED AND SAID WALID WAS A PRISONER OF THE LEFT, WHICH IS TRUE.)

5. REGARDING SARKIS AND THE ARMY, I SAID THEIR OBSERVATIONS SURPRISED ME VERY MUCH. SARKIS WAS INTIMIDATED BY LEBANESE FRONT, BUT THERE WAS NO ONE ON MUSLIM SIDE TO GIVE HIM SUPPORT AGAINST THEM. HE WAS DOING HIS BEST TO MAINTAIN BALANCE BUT NEEDED HELP. WE ALL AGREED HIS MOST URGENT NEED WAS FOR A GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS ADVISOR, AND THAT HE SHOULD BE SEEING MORE OF MUSLIM LEADERS.

6. WITH REGARD TO ARMY, I SAID KHOURY WAS AN HONEST MAN DOING HIS BEST TO BUILD AN INTEGRATED NON-SECTARIAN ARMY. THE BARRACKS AT FAYYADIYAH HAD BEEN INTEGRATED, AS WERE THE ARMY STAFF AT YARZE AND THE TWO RECENTLY FORMED DEFENSE BATTALIONS. IT WAS PERHAPS TOO EARLY TO INTEGRATE THE UNITS IN THE VARIOUS BARRACKS AROUND THE COUNTRY, BUT OUR SURVEY TEAM HAD BEEN PLEASANTLY SURPRISED AT THE DEGREE OF INTEGRATION THEY FOUND. WE AGREED THAT KHOURY ALSO NEEDED TO DO SOME PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK WITH THE MUSLIMS.

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7. WE SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. JUMBLATT SAID THERE WAS NO USE TALKING OF PALESTINIANS DISARMING. A REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT WITHOUT ARMS WAS A NONENTITY. ALL IT COULD DO WAS SIT AROUND IN CAFES AND TALK. HE SAID SUNNI MUSLIMS WERE NEVER GOING TO DECLARE AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS AS CHRISTIANS WANTED THEM TO BECAUSE THEY REGARDED PALESTINIANS AS A FORM OF PROTECTION AGAINST CHRISTIANS. THIS DEPENDENCE ON PALESTINIANS WAS REGRETTABLE, BUT CHRISTIANS HAD SO FAR LET OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE WITH MUSLIMS PASS AND MUSLIMS WERE CONCERNED BY EXTREMIST CHRISTIAN TALK. HE THOUGHT PALESTINIANS MIGHT AGREE TO RETURN THEIR ARMED MEN TO THE CAMPS BUT THEIR ARMED PRESENCE WAS A FACT OF LIFE TO WHICH LEBANESE WOULD HAVE TO ADJUST.

9. COMMENT: UNDERLYING THESE COMMENTS WAS AN UNSTATED WARNING THAT OUR ARMING OF THE LEBANESE ARMY WAS REGARDED AS AN ANTI-PALESTINIAN AND PERHAPS ANTI-MUSLIM ACTION. THIS IS THE OBTVERSE OF THE HARDENING OF CHRISTIAN POSITIONS VIS-A-VIS THE MUSLIMS. WE ARE MOVING BACK INTO CONFRONTATIONAL POLITICS.
PARKER

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